

# Present Constructed from the Past

## Attempts to Shape National Architecture in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Hungary

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Nineteenth century Hungarian architecture can be seen as being typically European, more specifically Central European, regarding its networks and the forms it applied. The birth of modern nation-states did not only bring about a shared agenda for Central European architecture but also parallel national perspectives emerged. The search for identity (and occasionally its representation) remained a challenge in this respect. In the following, I will discuss the attempts at establishing a national architecture and its conceptual framework in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, in view of their architectural context and articulation.

### The beginnings of a historical viewpoint in architecture

Modern historical approach to the past, and with it the demand to visualize historicity in art and architecture emerged in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, often pertaining to the wish to uncover local history. Activities pursuing the popularization of *Landeskunde* in Austria (and the Central European space) at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century should be seen as part and parcel of the identity-seeking process of emerging nation-states. Somewhat later this activity appeared also in Hungary. When listing the (both natural and artificial) landmarks in all corners of the country, an inventory was made of famous artistic and architectural vestiges. Literary and *Landeskunde* journals propagated the inclusion of different peoples, customs, renowned places and artifacts into the collective (national) consciousness.<sup>1</sup> In the history of local patriotic and *Landeskunde* thought, Vienna and Pozsony (Bratislava), and the German inhabitants of the latter played a pivotal role. The city hosted multiple journals on local history and literature.<sup>2</sup> From among those journals edited by Germans with a *Hungarus* identity the one entitled

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1 An early piece among these was *Wienerisches Diarium* (1703–1779), which became a model for other journals assuming a *Landeskunde* agenda or propagating the development of national consciousness.

2 *Ungrisches Magazin Beiträge zur ungrischen Geschichte, Geographie, Naturwissenschaft, und der dahin schlagenden Literatur* 1781-83, 1787, *Intelligenzblatt für Ungarn. Beiblatt der Pressburger Zeitung* 1798-1835.

*Zeitschrift von und für Ungern zur Beförderung der vaterländischen Geschichte, Erdkunde und Literatur 1802–1804* is of special interest to my research. The journal published the article of the Czech Johann Schauff in 1804 about the most important pieces of Hungarian architecture and their architects. Schauff aimed at integrating this branch of art and artists into the national canon, which was mostly populated by towering figures of history and literature. At that point, national consciousness was tightly bound to dynastic loyalty and its propaganda. This is demonstrated well by an earlier publication of the same author. Being inspired by the victories of Joseph II against the Ottomans, Schauff designed a fantasy order of columns, calling it “Hungarian”. He published the design at his own cost in celebration of the coronation of Joseph II.<sup>3</sup> The plinth of the column was decorated with turban-like motifs, while its capital was shaped similarly to a Hussar chako (a common military headdress). The frieze was decorated with motifs of the Hungarian coat-of-arms, the entablature was covered with shapes that reminded of the enamelled finials of the Hungarian crown.

In the context of architecture, the interest in historical traditions meant dominantly the rediscovery of medieval forms. First this interest was embodied in the composition of gardens and related buildings (pavilions, gloirettes, chapels, mausoleums, artificial ruins). Moreover, in the material culture of the urban bourgeoisie, medieval (or so claimed) shapes and forms emerged as identity-forming tools at the time. This historical approach is represented by buildings erected at the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Classicism which understood the legacy of the Greek and Roman antiquity as the manifestation of the eternal forms of the highest level of art, remained also influential. By the 1820s and 1830s Gothic forms became dominant among objects and buildings that aimed to represent the national past.<sup>4</sup>

### The national within and beyond the universal

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century primarily German and Austrian works of aesthetics and architectural theory influenced the Hungarian discourse on national characteristics in general, and national architecture in particular. National communities depicted their place within the universe through art. They understood national art as a specific sphere of art which, while embracing universal art, at the same time enriched it with the individual talent and originality of the artist. Thus it is clear that arts seen as national in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century constituted part of the narrative of universal arts through a specific empirical and spiritual approach. It did not result in divisions in terms of the national identification process, contrary to what happened later.

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<sup>3</sup> Schauff, *Theorie der Säulenordnungen*.

<sup>4</sup> See Papp, “Medievalism.”

From the 1840s on historicism thrived, and Hungarian works on national architecture, following Herder's theory, linked the national character of architectural objects to landscape, climate, local building materials and way of life. Accordingly, national architecture meant invention and originality, its proponent had to be in possession of artistic imagination, fantasy and originality. Imre Henszlmann wrote the following in his 1841 essay entitled *Parallels between the Artistic Views and Education of the Ancient and the Modern Age, with Special Regard to the Development of Arts in Hungary*: an artist can rise high only if (s)he is able to become one with his or her object (empiricism) and fills it with idea (spiritual element). Henszlmann also connected the national character to the national way of life.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, he followed German Romantics when he depicted national character (the most advanced stage of human existence) as the most distinguished way to satisfy the demands for variety. Concerning the artistic depiction of national character and the state of affairs in Hungary, Henszlmann suggested that "national style has to be established, which is the only one that can expect lasting existence". For architects, such an agenda was of special importance.

Historicity in national self-depiction became dominant in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which brought about two consequences. On one hand, *universal* and *national*, once complementary concepts, became separate and gained new, mutually exclusive contents. On the other hand, the historical value of an artifact gained primacy over aesthetics in the course of the search for and creation of *national arts*. What *national* approach found essential, *universal* deemed particular. Similarly, for national arts, eternal, universal values of arts were replaced by concern for the spirit of national past. For the latter, the national character was determined by local traditions, history and climate. These considerations still mirrored the criteria of Herder's definition of the nation.

Seen from the perspective of national identification another relevant response to the challenge of universal aesthetics emerged in Bavaria in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Maximilian II wished to create a local style in order to contribute to identity-formation and to strengthen common historical consciousness, envisioning *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The first step was the establishment of the royal residence, the future *Maximilianeum* (1856–1874). It is telling that in the planning phase, the name of the royal seat (*Athenäum*) did not reflect on local traditions or the past of the Bavarian royal dynasty (although it bore significance in the fine arts agenda). Instead, the shared European roots and the cradle of classic democracy were brought to the fore. However, the competition did not prove successful, and the building erected was based on the plans of Maximilian II's favorite architect, Friedrich Bürklein, after

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5 See Papp, "Vezessük be minél előbb nemzeti hagyományainkat a modern világba."

6 See Nerding, *Zwischen Glaspalast und Maximilianeum*; Hahn, *Der Maximilianstil in München*.

multiple modifications being made on the original design. The style that came to be known as *Maximilianstil* combined the forms of Anglo-Saxon perpendicular Gothic and Gottfried Semper's reinterpretation of the Italian Renaissance. This phenomenon, initiated by the king himself, made a considerable impact on Central European attempts at creating national architecture, perhaps due to its unique effort to create *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Both the ideology (the agenda of establishing national arts) and the forms of the *Maximilianstil* had a significant influence on Hungarian historians and architects. From among Henszlmann's contemporaries, it was Frigyes Feszl, who was for long preoccupied with the thought of creating a national architectural style. As a true Romantic artist, he considered artistic invention, imagination and individuality key concepts. Feszl, who was educated in Munich, internalized the idea that national style as a whole should be manifest in the shaping of architecture. His work shows the impact of *Maximilianstil* and *Rundbogenstil*, the latter relying heavily on the former, but incorporating Oriental and Byzantine elements and earning great success in Central Europe. Subsequent interpretations aimed at linking Hungarian characteristics of Feszl's works to single motifs or ornaments, disregarding the complex entanglement between artistic invention and national arts suggested by him and his contemporaries. The Vigadó Concert Hall (1859–1865), Feszl's main work, is often used to support this argument. However, the motifs described as Hungarian were either not the architect's own inventions (e.g. the frontage or the sculptural decoration of the interior) or were mistaken for having Hungarian origins (like in the case of applying the so called Austrian knot, a typical ornament of the Hungarian military uniform).<sup>7</sup> This interpretative frame shows clearly how the younger generation seeks to insert the heritage of its predecessors into its imagined artistic genealogy, presupposing different underlying ideas from the original ones. As noted earlier, until the 1860s, the concept of the nation was largely determined by empirical and spiritual features, the intuition and artistic imaginary as well as local climate and conditions. This very conceptualization of the nation with a strong embeddedness in the Romantistic framework prevailed long, in parallel with other views. That was the case with the architect Antal Szkalnitzky, who penned down his thoughts on national architecture on the occasion of the design competition for the palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1860 (he himself submitted a tender). He said that "[the person] who learned how to stand on his own feet, who therefore does not want to copy or to imitate, but to follow the inspiration of his genius, is devoted to create independently in national spirit." The possibility to establish a complex, overarching national style was called into question after 1860 in Hungarian theory on arts and architecture. One of the first among those concerned was

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7 Ney, "Feszl Frigyes meghalt," Ney, "Nemzeti építőművészet és stílus."

Imre Henszlmann, the same person who earlier acted as an advocate of establishing a pure national style.

### From Gothic to Renaissance and beyond

As Anna Zádor has argued, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the High Middle Ages, more specifically Gothic was seen in Europe as “the greatest blossoming of national arts, the most suitable way to express national self-consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> The in-depth study of Gothic art and architecture led Imre Henszlmann to the recognition of certain geometric rules he discussed in his works on theory of proportion.<sup>9</sup> These rules convinced him about the unique ability of Gothic from among other historical styles to stand the challenges posed by modern architecture. As the main Hungarian expert on Gothic, Henszlmann applying the ideas of Franz Mertens concerning the relationship between French and German Gothic,<sup>10</sup> discussed Hungarian Gothic architecture in conjunction with that of the German-speaking lands, where the latter acted as the intermediary of French ideas,<sup>11</sup> Henszlmann’s ideas about the path-setting potentials of the Middle Ages and Gothic had plenty of interlocutors in different contexts. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, historicism represented a new dimension of scientific rigor. The monuments’ surveys provided a gradually more nuanced picture of medieval architecture and their context. The investigation of the monuments brought about the popularization of their form-repertoire, which was able to satisfy the growing need for authenticity. Henszlmann himself participated in the exploration of buildings and their subsequent renovation. The framework for these projects was provided by the National Committee for Monuments and its predecessor within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Thus, for Henszlmann, who was both a historian of architecture and a practicing architect, the Gothic style of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century proved to be the ideal and perfect architectural form of expression. This idea was articulated in 1862 in Henszlmann’s call for the design-competition of the construction of the palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in his proposal for the very same competition that he submitted jointly with two colleagues, Károly Gerster and Lajos Frey. Henszlmann elaborated why the Gothic as a modern but national style is the most suitable one for a building with such a great symbolical value. As a man who insisted on his ideas stubbornly, he tried to convince his competitors (Heinrich Ferstel and Miklós Ybl) to apply with medieval designs after his own proposal was

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8 Zádor, “Henszlmann Imre építészelmélete és a „gótizálás” kialakulása,” 210.

9 Szentesi, “Arányelmélet,” 30–34, Henszlmann, *Constructional laws of mediaeval church architecture*; Henszlmann, *Théorie des proportions*.

10 Mertens, “Baukunst des Mittelalters.”

11 Henszlmann, *Kassa városának ónémet stíliú templomai*.

rejected.<sup>12</sup> The secret agreement was revealed though, and after the first round was invalidated, the jury circulated a new call, and the Neo-Renaissance plans of Friedrich August Stüler (in line with the personal preferences of Emil Dessewffy, the head of the jury) gained support.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of this fiasco Henszlmann kept propagating the Gothic style in his articles. He declared that a Hungarian national style did not exist just as there were no national architectural elements. The reasons for that lie in the nomadic origins of Hungarians, who used to copy foreign patterns. In case we want to establish a national style of architecture, he continued, we have to choose from among the traditions that are already there. He deemed Gothic to be most suitable for that purpose. Instead of emphasizing pragmatism, he reasoned that this style can be easily connected to the past of the nation "because we should not forget that the golden ages of our history went hand in hand with Gothic architecture."<sup>14</sup> Although his plan for the Palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was rejected, his theory attracted many scholars and architects. Gothic remained influential through monument surveys, particularly when it came to the construction of churches.

The views that interpreted the idea of national architecture within the context of national history presented themselves at the design-competition for the construction of the Palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for the first time. Some of the proponents of medieval forms followed Medieval architecture in general (from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century), or like Henszlmann, propagated the early Gothic (from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century), while others preferred the Romanesque style and its layers preserving Byzantine elements. The latter was especially popular among those architects, who integrated the *Rudbogenstil* which served as an important reference for Romanticism. A document concerning the design of the palace from 1861 noted: *...the only reasonable and successful way to design the palace of the academy could have been the application of a mixture of Roman and Byzantine styles, the new Bank in Vienna, the church of Fót and a Pester building opposite to the [National] Museum are all convincing examples that testify to the greater viability of this mode than that of Classicism and Gothic...*<sup>15</sup>

*Concerning the building of the above mentioned Redoute, they claimed that Feszl "spotted the Byzantine style for us" while searching for an architectural style fitting to the Hungarian spirit. In 1863 another reviewer wrote about one of his other projects, the so called Kistemplom in Debrecen that the Byzantine style from a national point of view "is more characteristic than any other architectural style." Because of their similarity to Romanesque forms, Byzantine characteristics*

12 Kemény, *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia palotája*, 50–51.

13 Kemény, *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia palotája*, 52–58.

14 Henszlmann "A Magyar Akadémia épülete," 91.

15 Hencz és Bergh, "Észrevételek az akadémia palotája ügyében" 621. See: Komárik, "A nemzeti elem Feszl Frigyes művészetében," 108.

played an important role even two decades later as models for the architecture based on national past. In 1883, in the course of evaluating the plans for the new Parliament an assessment concerning the plan in Byzantine style (Kálmán Gerster) stated that it “suits Hungarian taste the best, and its Romanesque motifs retain an essence of old Hungarian architecture, which enables it to become a foundation for Hungarian style.”<sup>16</sup>

The architects trying to establish a national style using medieval sources had something in common. They approached architectural styles that were linked to the era of the independent Kingdom of Hungary. The intimate link between nationalism and independence gave a political dimension to the investigation of this issue. Considered within the context of various discourses on national historiography and literature that were similarly centered around the questions of independence versus integration, sovereign entity versus common European tradition, this phenomenon reveals the dominant ideological trends of the time, i.e. liberalism and national patriotism, and sheds light on the intellectual networks behind them. There is no comprehensive study discussing this structural aspect of Hungarian intellectual circles of the period. Yet, we can say for now that the Lutheran bourgeoisie of Upper Hungary (e.g. followers of Kossuth, like Henszlmann) as well as German citizens of Pest (Frigyes Feszli) had a great influence in the circles in which the idea to combine the notion of independence and that of the nationalism was internalized. However, there were also theories that suggested the Hungarian manifestation of Renaissance (a style period that lasted in Hungary longer than elsewhere in Europe) to be the main inspiration for the creation of a national style. 17<sup>th</sup>-century manors of Upper Hungary triggered the ideas of the architect Béla Ney (1878) that a new artistic style could be created suitable for the characteristics of our “customs, way of life and climate”.<sup>17</sup>

In the following, I will discuss the remarkable similarity of other Central European regions to Hungary, in terms of their search for a national style, regularly in connection with polemics surrounding buildings that carry symbolical allusions to national identity. In Bohemia, the emblematic national monuments of Gothic like the Hradzin and the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague influenced first and foremost church architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The extension of the city hall followed Gothic patterns in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>18</sup> and it had a considerable impact on nearby buildings.<sup>19</sup> In other cases, Gothic style functioned as part of the identity-building quest of the German population in Bohemia.<sup>20</sup> The German population in Brno (Brünn) built the hall of its training association in a style that was characteristic for Northern

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16 *Budapesti Hírlap*, April 22, 1883, 2. See Gábor and Verő, *Az Ország háza*, 148.

17 Ney, *Jelentés a Párisi 1878-iki kiállításról építészeti szempontból*.

18 Built in 1844-48, designed by Paul Sprenger.

19 See end of 19<sup>th</sup> century residential houses of the St Nicholas Sq.

20 Built in 1867-68, 1883, designed by August Prokopp.

German territories in the Middle Ages, the so-called brick-Gothic. This building, as an artifact embodying the identity of a group of citizens is of special interest for it was the only secular Neo-Gothic building in the town center<sup>21</sup> surrounded by Neo-Renaissance buildings of the Czech population (the center of their civic association<sup>22</sup> and the Polytechnic).<sup>23</sup> It seems that in the multicultural settlements various national groups preferred different historical styles when they were to represent their identity through the construction of public buildings and the urban spaces they occupied. In the above example Gothic was chosen by the German inhabitants, while Renaissance (more specifically its Northern variant) was used by the Czech population.<sup>24</sup>

In Poland, the idea of a historically inspired national architecture was influential from the end of the 1860s until the turn of the century. When a scientific survey of medieval historical monuments started in the 1870s, two main types of Gothic churches were identified. On one hand, there were the brick churches with two symmetrical towers, akin to those in Northern German churches that mushroomed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and retained great popularity. At the end of the century, a number of "Polish national brick-Gothic" churches were erected.<sup>25</sup> The churches that belong to the other group had asymmetric towers and huge, double windows on the Western façade.<sup>26</sup> The shapes and forms of these monuments of the so-called Vistula-Baltic Gothic were also utilized in the construction of Polish national Gothic.<sup>27</sup> In the course of establishing national architecture, in parallel with the "discovery" of the Vistula-Baltic Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque emerged as important influences from the 1870s on. The restoration of the Cloth Hall in Cracow (*Sukiennice*) began in 1875. It is known that Renaissance forms of Wavel (whose restoration was planned from 1890) served as a great inspiration for contemporary architects. From the 1880s on, the Attic motifs of the Cloth Hall, the cloister of Wavel, and elements of the Sigismund Chapel were transplanted to local buildings as national motifs giving a national meaning to them.<sup>28</sup>

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21 See Galeta, *National Houses – Damnation Memoriae?*

22 Built in 1871-73, designed by Theophil Hansen.

23 Built in 1859-60.

24 Hnidkova and Vybíral, *Národní styl*; Marek, *Kunst und Identitätspolitik*.

25 St. Florian Church, Warsaw (1888-1901).

26 The Mary and St Catherin Churches in Cracow both belong to this trend.

27 Many churches from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century belong to this category, e.g. the parish church of Dłutów (1893).

28 In the Old Town of Kraków, the Slowaczki Theater (1889-93, Jan Zawiejski) and to a certain extent the Art Nouveau Old Theater (1903-06, F Maczynski and T. Stryjenski) resemble the motifs of the cloth hall. This typical facade closing element was not only common on public buildings but also on residential ones as. Omilanowska, "Searching for a national Style in Polish Architecture," 99-116; Balus, *Krakau zwischen Traditionen und Wegen in die Moderne*; Stefański, "Koncepcje stylu narodowego w architekturze polskiej początku XX wieku jako wyraz triumfu prowincji."

In the Baltic the struggle for national freedom and national identity went hand in hand with the construction of a counter-narrative against German (and Russian) ones. As a result, the notion of a specific Baltic-German identity emerged. The locally preserved medieval architecture was treated as a deposit of national identity. It is not by accident that this set of monuments served as the pursuit for establishing a local-national architectural style at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this narrative, medieval monuments (namely those buildings belonging to the group of North German brick-Gothic) played a pivotal role.

The southern parts of Central-Europe trod a somewhat different path towards constructing their national identity and national architecture. Architects in the Croatian lands who worked towards an architecture with national identity drew inspiration, like their Hungarian colleagues, from buildings mostly of Gothic style representing the golden ages of national history. This pursuit was enriched by the creation of a national narrative independent of those Austrian and Hungarian ones at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup>

In Bosnian towns (Sarajevo, Skopje) Muslims constituted a large part of the population in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, among the main elements of urban architecture (beyond Christian monuments) the influence of Islam was remarkable. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the modernization of these towns started under the auspices of Austrian Institutions. The process was led by Viennese architects whose work was based on certain preconceptions concerning Eastern architecture. Most European architects met Eastern buildings in the pavilions of world exhibitions or similar fairs. These were influenced primarily by the architecture of North African French colonies. These buildings, consisting of a mixed system of motives were called oriental. Today the style is called Moorish in the literature (therefore I use it in this form also). Among the European empires the Austrian was the smallest one to possess provinces that belonged to the Eastern world. The European praxis was the colonization (at that time considered to be the civilization) of these territories. In this process architects had a special role as it was their responsibility to implement the new structures. Starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, state and municipal buildings were built in orientalist/Moorish style following Viennese designs in some Bosnian cities, and creating new city centers and urban structures. At the same time local motifs (as opposed to that of the Moorish style) were also retained by some of the new buildings.<sup>30</sup> The city structure was often seriously altered by

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29 Damjanovic, "Polychrome Roof Tiles and National Style."

30 Among these we can find the former Shariah School [Šerijatsko sudačke škole ] in Sarajevo (1886-87, Karl Parik), which, although the proportions of its exterior follow the moorish style, its plan is based first and foremost on the features of the old local school (medrese, 1557). The inner courtyard shows a blend of moorish and local Islamic tradition.

colonization. In Bosnia and in other, previously Islam-dominated cities of the region, earlier structures often remained intact in certain areas, while the colonizer built a modern urban structure in some other districts with straight, rectangular streets.<sup>31</sup>

### From historic national shape to historic national spirit

Renowned monuments served as important examples for the idea of national architecture that wished to draw on the past in terms of its repertoire of motifs. As the idea slowly crystallized, it made use of systematic monument surveys and was greatly influenced by the institution which provided the expertise for them (MOB, i.e. Committee of National Monuments). Restorations followed these surveys that were conducted on a purist basis interested in the reconstruction of an imagined ideal-typical state. Naturally, such forms never existed, and in consequence, the given monuments and their situation were falsified for the sake of providing a “purified” version. The groups of monuments bearing historical significance were canonized. In this way, not only the motifs and forms were ascertained, but the specific approach also to the past. Intuition and individual invention fell victims to the narrowing down of the framework within which national architecture was supposed to navigate. Thus the danger to which Béla Ney, Antal Szkalnitzky and others called the attention of their contemporaries became reality. The buildings of the historical department at the millennial exhibition serve as telling examples for the praxis of science-based imitation at the end of the century. Commemorating the millennia of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin, the exhibition was supposed to depict the Hungarian past and present. The former was set in a building complex where artefacts from different periods of the nation’s past were exhibited. The styles of the buildings that were made up of architectural replicas were adjusted to the period of origin of the exhibited objects. So the history of Hungary was narrated from the times of the conquest until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, relying on the architectural framework provided by Roman-Gothic-Renaissance and Baroque annexes. The complex called Vajdahunyadvár (named after its most notable annex) can be seen as an ultimate synthesis of Hungarian historicism. The construction and afterlife of the building complex shows the impasse of an architecture representing national identity. Furthermore, it sheds light on the limitations historicist architecture faced in the articulation of self-image. The exhibition-like setting showcased history as a theatrical scene, which contributed to the monument’s enrichment in content. The copies of historical buildings were seen as means of shaping national identity and consciousness.<sup>32</sup> However, it seems that

31 See Hartmuth, “K. (u.)k. colonial?”

32 See Bálint, *Az ezredéves kiállítás architektúrája*, 37.

these copies did not live up to the high hopes they generated. Despite all the hard work academics put into them, the never-existing national architecture have not been constructed. Gothic and Renaissance monuments of urban architecture in Upper Hungary made it into the collection of the samples of national architecture. However, it was through the ideas they transmitted rather than their architectural merits that made them representatives of national consciousness. This in fact shows that historicism (however meticulously it applied beloved historical forms) was not able to respond to the challenge that national architecture posed.<sup>33</sup>

The realization of these problems urged the reconsideration of the attitude towards the past. For the historicist view the monument was the perfect reflection of the past. Historicism treated it as the original, purest source. Therefore monuments, relics from a time long passed, retained historical value themselves. These principles brought about two important consequences. First, the conviction that historical value should be attributed to the monuments that were purified from the disturbing layers later ages added to them. Second, the distinction between old and historical which gained further significance in Alois Riegl's theory concerning age value and historical value (*Moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und Seine Entstehung*, 1919). In this writing, Riegl touches upon imitation, as one of the fundamental questions in historicism. He claimed that the copy can gain historical value if the original one is lost. This viewpoint was extended also to other artefacts in historicism (objects, texts). For an architect in the second half on the 19<sup>th</sup> century the constructed past made up for the lack of its direct experience and thus "past became constant present" (to paraphrase Dilthey).

For Henszlmann, national characteristics were best depicted by the aptly formulated historical style. In contrast, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century historical styles were not used anymore (with the exception of purist restorations) for the construction of buildings representing national identity. Contemporary modern architecture was rather dominated by functionalism and cared little for the shapes and forms representing the past of the nation and their architectural articulation. Therefore, architectural constructions were rather European than national in character. With buildings that were supposed to contribute to national identity-building there were different strategies to reconcile the universality of the form with the particularity of the national spirit that was supposed to be expressed. Style was not often prescribed in architectural programs and if the architectonic forms were devoid of national sentiments, the adornment made up for it. In the case of the Opera in Budapest (Miklós Ybl, 1884) and the Parliament (Imre Steindl, 1884–1895), the inner and outer sculptures as well as the indoor paintings were responsible for carrying national features. Their national character is definitely not supported by their style. At the same time, the decoration of the Parliament does not suggest a

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33 See Papp, "Királyaink korának lehellete."

coherent agenda. The sculpted and depicted scenes are connected through their engagement with Hungarian history and landscape. Steindl himself said, pertaining to the introduction of the building and its Gothic style: Hungary was not in *“the lucky situation to be able to grant national features to Gothic, because at that time...the required long-lasting peace was absent...Our architectural forms that can be carved in stone have no national characteristic.”* Here he depicts Gothic as a style that fits the character of given nations and local materials. He did not apply the framework of contemporary aesthetics but retrieved the concept of style from half a century ago. About the adornment he said the following: *“For that purpose, on the wall surfaces...I used all the motifs of our preexisting two-dimensional decorations [i.e. ornaments] in the spirit of the Gothic style. Our country’s flora, the plants of the fields and woods, their forms...I applied in a stylized way”*.<sup>34</sup>

Critique emerged as early as the 1880s against the various trends that sought to establish national characteristics based on diverse traditions. For those who interpreted Hungarian arts in aesthetic terms, approaching it within a European discourse, and thus reflecting on current intellectual and artistic considerations, national art was not only past-focused but self-limited. They attempted at putting the concept of national arts into a different context. These intellectuals internalized positivism and Darwin’s evolutionary theory. The art historian Károly Pulszky, director of the Museum of Applied Arts and later that of the National Picture Gallery, was among the chief proponents of this idea. In his writings Pulszky reevaluated the concept of national style. He discussed local taste and characteristics from the viewpoint of universal styles that had to be seen in historical perspective instead of a national framework. Applying the latest results of research on ornaments to the local context, which was an essential approach within the framework of national arts, he pointed out the fact that given formal solutions were primarily tied to certain objects and materials rather than to folks. Consequently, motifs deemed to be nation-specific were in fact present in the arts of various folks with different traditions and vernaculars. Jenő Radisics, director of the Museum of Applied Arts had similar ideas. On one hand, he demonstrated the Europe-wide dissemination of folk motifs that became more and more popular at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, he treated this repertoire of motifs as the starting point for the evolution of applied arts.<sup>35</sup>

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34 Steindl Imre, “Az új országházról.”

35 See Papp, “Pulszky, Iparművészet és stíl,” and “Radisics, Huszka.”

## The notions “authentic” and “original” within the context of the national

New trends emerged in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pursuing still the quest for determining the main sources for national arts. Their focus shifted from the relics of shared history and the historical styles to sources that were more intimately tied to local traditions, and thus showed less change in the course of time. This ahistoricity was embodied in folk art, which transmitted an ancient, “unchanged” tradition. Folk art proved to be able to inspire the establishment of national architecture in Central Europe, Hungary included, by the last third of the century. Detached from historicist views, national architecture harmonized new architectural ideas with the challenges of modern architecture.

Gottfried Semper played an important role in the dissemination of this approach, primarily through his research on ornaments, an investigation that was influenced by Darwinism. In conjunction with the axiom of the evolution of the ornament, Semper claimed that an “original state” had once existed. At its highest stage, using the characteristics of local architecture and crafts, it attained different variants of national arts.

The proponents of the theory of ornament compared the development structures of the ornament to that of grammar structures (Owen Jones, 1856, Johann Eduard Jacobstahl, 1874). Although some elements of Semper’s theory were criticized decades later,<sup>36</sup> the German architect brought back the ahistorical approach into the debates about local variants of architecture. The theory rapidly gained popularity arguing that the ancient modes of expression folk and peasant art preserved were relevant for modern architecture.<sup>37</sup> It was the first time in Central Europe, including Hungary, that the nation was approached, thanks to the novelties of Semper’s work, from an ahistoric point of view. Lechner Ödön was the most important Hungarian representative of this model. A new conceptualization of applied arts served as an additional source for Lechner. First and foremost we should consider John Ruskin, a man engaged in craftsmanship and homecraft who contrasted the wealth of the woodcarving with the industrial products of modern European cities. Lechner’s architecture showed novelty and yet made a great impact, because he was able to offer an alternative to the establishment of national architecture in a period when historical forms seemed to be devoid of meaning. Lechner also needed to break with the historicist model, which responded to architectural challenges with the help of respective elements of fitting historical styles. Lechner was surrounded by this idea both in Budapest and in Berlin where he was trained. He saw perspective in the originality suggested

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36 See von Falke, *Aesthetik des Kunstgewerbes*.

37 See Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten*.

by contemporary French architecture he learnt in the early years of his career, and he himself started experimenting with the establishment of a style that did not exist before. Courage and talent shine through these attempts (Thonet House, Budapest, 1889). In his memoirs he claims that his trip to England and the Indian features of colonial architecture led him to discover the form-repertoire of Hungarian folk art. However, his large-scale projects attest to his familiarity rather with oriental monuments and motifs than with Hungarian folk art or material culture (Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, 1896). Lechner always attempted to create buildings that retain an absolute integrity. He claimed that “architecture should erupt from the building itself”. Construction, structure and building materials should all reflect this idea as well as ornaments. The latter hints at the similarity of Lechner’s idea to that of another architect, A.W. Pugin, who insisted that all ornaments should originate from the basic structure of the building. Lechner’s experiments in architecture brought about material outcomes as well. In the course of developing European (German) architectural achievements further, he discovered colored enameled terracotta that proved to be the perfect type of quarry tile for buildings of big cities both from aesthetical and practical points of view. Lechner was not alone in Central Europe with his attempts at creating a new national grammar of forms. Similar trends were in the making in other countries at the same time testifying to the fact that linking national style to ahistoric, rather than historic discourses was a central tenet of the time. (The spread of the Zakopane style in Poland as well as the “discovery” of Czech and Slovak folk architecture were expressions of the same phenomenon.)<sup>38</sup>

Lechner’s views were quite modern at the time. His writings tell us about his vision of an inclusive mass architecture that transcends national boundaries. *“Capitalism destroys the opportunities of old styles, erects giant warehouses on metal pedestals and digs day by day deeper into the ground beneath traditions that degraded into craftsmanship. It creates the equal tenement house to equal people and the democratic mass of equal people will compose the image of the modern street and city, which is the symbol of this aggregate.”*<sup>39</sup>

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We can conclude that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century various attempts were carried out in the hope of establishing national architecture. At the beginning of the century, in the spirit of the Romanticist approach, it was believed that individuality and invention creates original piece of art. At the same time, impregnated by local traditions and characteristics, the original masterpiece conveys the message of national ideas. By the 1850s though, the attempts in different national contexts shifted their foci to a specific architectural style

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38 See Crowley, “Finding Poland in the Margins;” Crowley, “Zakopane Style – National Style;” Filipová, “National treasure or a redundant relic.”

39 Lechner, “Önéletrajzi vázlat,” 356.

which was seen as the most suitable embodiment of national characteristics. In Hungary, from among previous architectural styles, Gothic seemed to be the perfect choice for long. Views on national architecture were further limited by the theoretical considerations that aroused in conjunction with the preservation of monuments and the architectural canon it created subsequently. The flexibility of the search for the national form was lost in the course of the crystallization of architectural patterns. New layers for the approach of the national style became available after a break with this idea. Evolutionary theories and anthropology fertilized research on ornament and architectural thought. The new approach to applied arts served as another source of inspiration. The perspective of the craftsman gave a brand new angle to research into the history of applied arts. The latter is closely connected to the use of local materials. The idea that local materials played a significant role in the development of historical styles resurfaced after Romanticism, and led to the recognition of the importance of local craftsmanship. As a consequence, the use of local materials in contemporary architecture became a self-evident expectation. It appears that around the year 1900 the discourse on national architecture recovered those concepts it left behind around the 1840s (originality, invention, artistic inspiration). With the acknowledgement of the craftsman, the individual retuned after 70 years of detour to the foreground. That was the last moment when discourses on national art and architecture run in parallel in the countries of Central Europe. Thereafter the ways had parted.

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